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"MAKING PUBLIC PLACES SACRED SPACES"

Elements of Community Arts Integration

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Curriculum development for **Community Arts Integration** projects address traditional national, state and local standards in the visual arts, Workplace Skills Standards, Service Standards and 21st Century learning skills.

Additional layers include UNESCO education goals including the core standards:

Learn to know
Learn to do
Learn to live together
Learn to be¹

Lets explore some of the pillars of community arts integration.

Place – What is our connection, what is the history of this place? Where did the name come from? What and who used to be here? What energy is here – can we change that – how? What ritual or activity can transform a place? How do we come to peace with place?

I also rely on teachings form the Chicago Public Art Group, one of the nations oldest community arts organizations. Their questions about place include:

Who spends time in the space?
How is the space used?
Who owns the space?
How does it feel to be in the space?
What makes this place unique?
Who plans the space?
Who pays for the space?
Who will physically create the space?
What are the benefits of community space design and community public art?²

Authentic Passion – This is more than a paid gig, a job or opportunity to serve. Community based cultural development, and the role of the lead artists is to be a completely present teacher, organizer, leader and role model.

Transfer of Skills/ Training - Integrating hands on lessons is critical to understanding the history and context of the arts. Community Arts involves a high level of craft combined with an ability to develop and implement curriculum that is in compliance with national, state, county and local educational standards.

Experts – The participants are the experts. Through this work we identify and network local talent, crafts people, business owners, workers of every profession. Implicit in this practice is the belief that each neighborhood, town or community is filled with people who are experts at all sorts of things - our goal is to bring together these people for creative endeavors that develop local capacity.

Trust in Relationship Building - We become a member of the communities we work in. This is a process of earning trust is slow. As community arts practitioners I believe the way we build that trust is to be ourselves, and give 110 percent.

Compassionate Listening - Teaching whole-participants involves more than just teaching about color, line or balance, it means infusing these teachings with passion and wisdom. Listening to the whole person is equally valuable. A variety of complex emotions, and memories emerge during these projects. As community artists our role is to listen, and channel that energy into art making activities related to the larger project. While one has the option of being trained as an Expressive Arts Therapist, many in the field do not have such training and will need to partner with experts in that field.

Outreach and Organizing – A centerpiece of community arts work involves community and neighborhood based research and organizing that leads up to that actual creation of artwork. While each practitioner uses their approach there are so many tasks that no one person can do them all. The community artist should be able to suggest proposed steps for the group to vote on.

In general these tasks include: ³

- Door-to-door canvassing
- Individual Interviews
- Variety of small and large meetings
- Phone calls
- Documentation
- Mapping
- Assessment
- Evaluation
- Administrative Support
- Financial Support
- Media Team

Alternate Roots in Georgia has some of the most advanced training for grassroots community based cultural organizing. The principles guiding their work are: "Power, Partnership, Transformation, Dialogue, Aesthetics"

Their organizing steps once invited to work with a community include:

- Site visit
- Dialogue
- Develop a tentative plan of action
- Share a draft of the plan of action
- Develop a plan for evaluation
- Involve local people
- Spend time in the community to carry out the action plan
- Evaluate⁴

There are numerous other resources and details to each of these pillars that we can explore at a later time. It is important to mention project implementation steps. In brief these include:

- An idea is proposed
- Develop and document community dialogue
- Visit the Site
- Research
- Expand the Dialogue
- Set Goals and Timeline
- Assign Roles
- Develop Budget & Identify Resources
- Fundraising
- Design Process
- Project Implementation
- Media
- Celebrate
- Evaluate
- Repeat

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2. Gude, Olivia and Pounds , Jon, “Questions for Designing Community Space”
Chicago Public Art Group http://www.cpag.net/guide/4/4_pages/4_2.htm
3. Schwartz, Michael, 2009 “Community Arts Applied Research” Organizing your interview questions and detailed description of tasks. (un-published)
4. “Resources for Social Change Workbook” 2009, Alternate Roots, Atlanta, GA